

### Abstract of the Disclosure

A ring network is provided. The ring network includes a number of network elements, each including first and second switch fabrics. At least two uni-directional  
5 busses are coupled between the first and second switch fabrics. A number of ring segments are coupled between adjacent network elements to form first and second routes for transporting cells using virtual connections wherein, for each virtual connection, one route is the working route and the other route is the protection route. The first and second switch fabrics of each network element are associated with one of  
10 the first and second routes. The first and second switch fabrics of each network element separately track the status of a number of virtual connections such that when an error is detected by one of the switch fabrics associated with a working route for a virtual connection, the switch fabric detecting the error communicates the change in state for the virtual connection to the other switch fabric over one of the first and second uni-  
15 directional busses to be used in a switching decision.